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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [BU](#)
SUBJECT: BULGARIA: BOYKO TAKES THE HELM

REF: A. SOFIA 381
[1](#)B. SOFIA 377

Classified By: Ambassador McEldowney for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Boyko Borissov -- a former bodyguard with a black belt in karate and an equally flamboyant personality -- was given the mandate to form Bulgaria's next government on July 16. A self-described political outsider and man-of-the-street, Borissov swept to power in July 5 elections on a pledge to fight corruption, restore public trust, and repair Bulgaria's credibility with Brussels and the world. A risk-taker by nature, Bulgaria's next Prime Minister is making his biggest gamble yet by walking away from all coalition possibilities to form a single-party minority government with 48 percent of parliamentary seats. To work, the strategy will depend on strict parliamentary discipline within GERB ranks, as well as frequent collection on promises of support from other parties -- a tall order in Bulgaria's fractured political arena. Borissov has assembled a solid cabinet of highly regarded technocrats, but they and Borissov are sorely lacking executive experience. Instinctively and explicitly pro-U.S., Borissov and his team are looking to deepen cooperation wherever possible. We should use this opening to help drive Bulgaria out of its post communist malaise, away from corruption and Russian patronage, and into a more effective NATO and EU partnership -- but we must proceed with our eyes open and be prepared for some rollercoaster rides. END SUMMARY.

FROM TOP COP TO PM

[1](#)2. (C) Borissov is pro-U.S. and pro-EU, and has spoken out in support of key U.S. policies such as the establishment of joint military bases in Bulgaria. He portrays himself as a special friend of the United States and clearly values our advice and approval. While serving as the Interior Ministry's Chief Secretary, Borissov developed a reputation for being extraordinarily cooperative with U.S. law enforcement. As Prime Minister, Borissov pledges to advance the bilateral partnership wherever possible, and has begun assembling a cabinet dominated by competent, U.S.-educated experts.

[1](#)3. (C) Nicknamed "Batman" for his zeal for action, Borissov enjoys popular support for his macho style and direct language, though his accomplishments as Sofia Mayor were unimpressive. With his rough hewn style and bullish physique, Borissov relates easily to ordinary Bulgarians and is viewed by them as a powerful figure capable of fighting for their interests. Though he plays up his common roots, he is a savvy politician and is adept at managing the Bulgarian news media. His party, Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria (GERB), has become the vehicle for many untainted political neophytes, eager to reverse their country's recent decline but, like Borissov, lacking experience.

¶4. (C) Borissov has been dogged by allegations of past links with organized crime figures. Borissov has never denied his past ties, but says these friendships dated from his years as a karate coach and categorically rejects allegations of involvement in crime. As Sofia Mayor since 2005, he appears to have kept his nose clean. If he wants to maintain popular support, he will have to stay pristine himself while also bringing down notoriously corrupt figures, as the voters have signaled they are fed up with kleptocrats.

A POLITICAL GAMBLER

¶5. (C) Eager to avoid the political compromises that crippled the previous Socialist-led, three party coalition and the over-sized egos heading potential coalition partners, Borissov is leaning towards a minority government in which GERB enjoys all the power -- and shoulders all the responsibility. The decision is risky. Without a parliamentary majority or reliable coalition partners, Borissov will depend on promises of support from some less than reliable -- and in one case unpalatable -- parties in opposition. His strategy will also depend on strict party discipline within GERB ranks, an open question given GERB's inexperienced cadre in Parliament. It is a challenge the risk-loving Borissov thinks he can pull off. The country is relying on this plain-speaking tough guy to transform himself into a statesman and Bulgaria into a respected EU member.

McEldowney